



Research Report

Rights of Way Improvement Plan Consultation – Parish and Town Councils

Findings from a survey of all Parish and Town Councils within Warwickshire
about the Rights of Way Improvement Plan

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Introduction

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 ("CROW") placed a duty on the County Council to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP), a 10-year plan for improving the provision of access to the countryside.

The plan will include the County Council's assessment of such things as;

- the extent to which Warwickshire's rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public,
- the opportunities provided by rights of way for exercise and open air recreation,
- the accessibility of the rights of way network to blind or partially sighted persons and those with mobility problems and
- targets for the future of the rights of way network.

In order to assess what should be included in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, consultation with interested parties was undertaken. Seven different questionnaires were designed and distributed to walkers / general countryside users, cyclists, horse riders, land managers, motorised users, Parish / Town Councils and Tourist Information Centres. The results in this report relate to the findings from the questionnaires distributed to **Parish and Town Councils**. The consultation was carried out in August and September 2004.

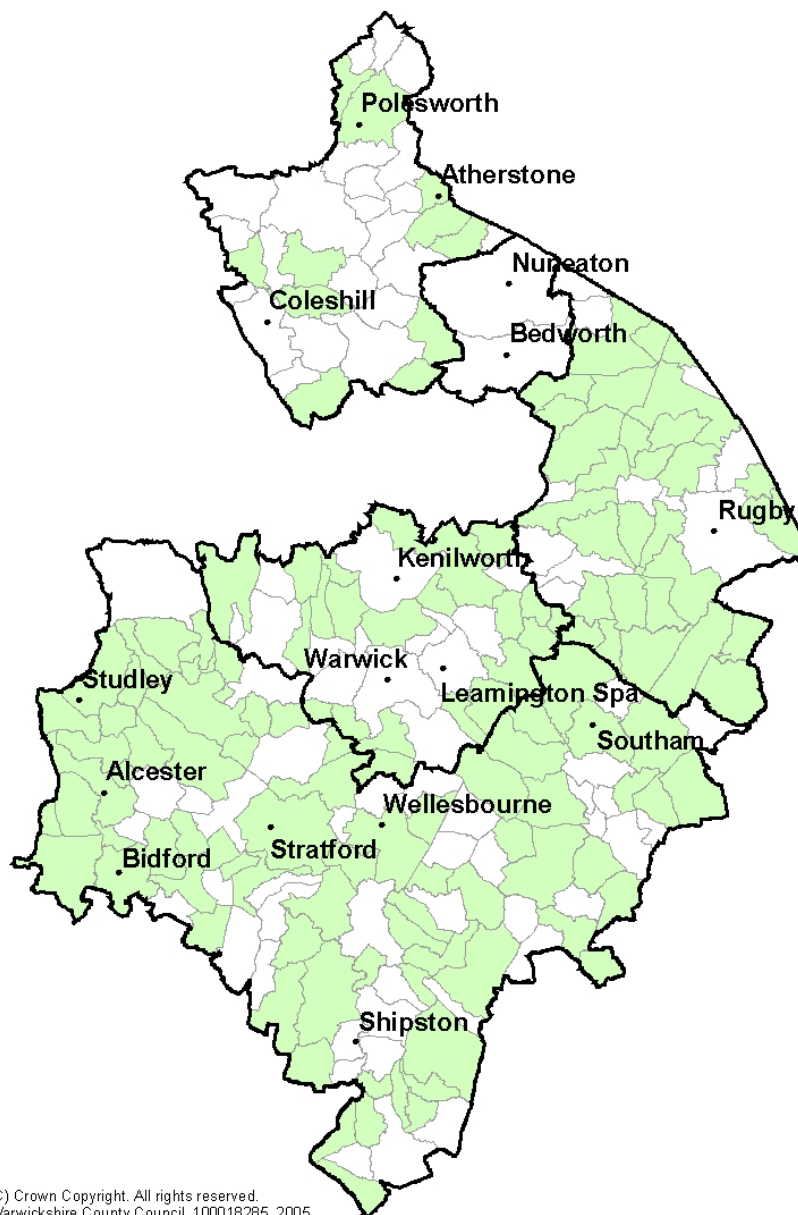
Key findings

- In total, 128 completed responses were received from the 225 that were distributed, a 57% response rate.
- Only 18% of Councils think that there are not enough footpaths, 28% think that there are not enough bridleways and 10% think that there are not enough unsurfaced vehicular routes in their area.
- 35% of Councils thought that the overall condition and signage of routes was either 'good' or very good', although 18% thought they were either 'poor' or 'very poor'.
- To enable more people to access rural paths in the countryside, Councils believe that priority should be given to 'properly reinstating field paths through crops or following ploughing'.
- To encourage people to use the rural paths network more, Councils believe that priority should be given to providing 'good quality circular trails and accompanying leaflets'.
- To improve access when walking or cycling on rural paths, Councils believe that priority should be given to 'reducing traffic speeds on country lanes'.
- To improve utility paths, Councils believe that priority should be given to 'improved surfacing' and 'vegetation clearance'.
- To improve the utility paths network, Councils believe that priority should be given to 'linking up existing paths'.

Response rates

- Questionnaires were sent to all Parish and Town Councils in the County – 225 in all. In total, 128 completed responses were received, a response rate of 57%.
- Response rates were as follows
 - North Warwickshire Borough 34% (11 out of 32)
 - Rugby Borough 77% (30 out of 39)
 - Stratford District 56% (68 out of 121)
 - Warwick District 40% (14 out of 35)
- There were five completed questionnaires that did not supply the name of their Parish or Town Council. Figure 1 shows the Parish and Town Councils that have responded to the questionnaire.

Figure 1: Map highlighting Councils that have responded



Results - Thinking about your parish and the immediate surrounds

- 80% of Councils think that they have about the right number of footpaths in their area, 18% think that there are not enough footpaths and 2% think there are too many.
- 72% of Councils think that they have about the right number of bridleways in their area, whilst 28% think there are not enough.
- 79% of Councils think they have about the right number of unsurfaced vehicular routes in their area, 10% think there are not enough and 11% think there are too many.
- 82% of Councils thought that the overall condition and signage of routes in their area were adequate or better than adequate.
- Figures 2 and 3 summarise the responses to these questions.

Figure 2: “What do you think about the extent of the rights of way and minor highway network?”

	Not enough	About right	Too many
Footpaths	18%	80%	2%
Bridleways	28%	72%	0%
Unsurfaced vehicular roads	10%	79%	11%

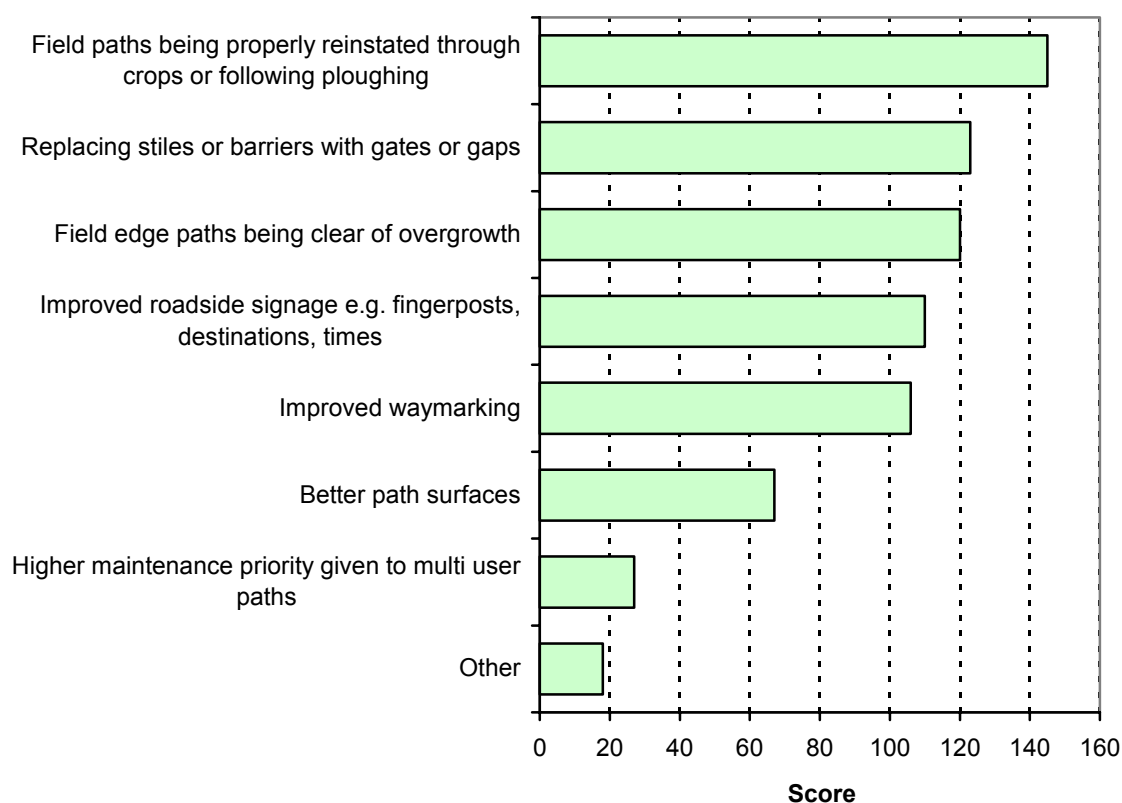
Figure 3: “In general how would you rate the overall condition and signage of the routes?”

	% of Councils
Very Good	6%
Good	29%
Adequate	47%
Poor	16%
Very poor	2%

Setting priorities for your area – thinking about rural paths

- Councils were asked to rate their top 3 priorities, in order to measure the following questions. If an option was the Council's first priority it was given a score of 3, if it was the Council's second option it was given a score of 2, and if it was the Council's third priority it was given a score of 1.
- Respondents were asked what would enable more people to access the countryside, from a list of eight options. The graph below shows the total score for each option based on the scoring system explained above.

Figure 4: "What would enable more people to access the countryside?"



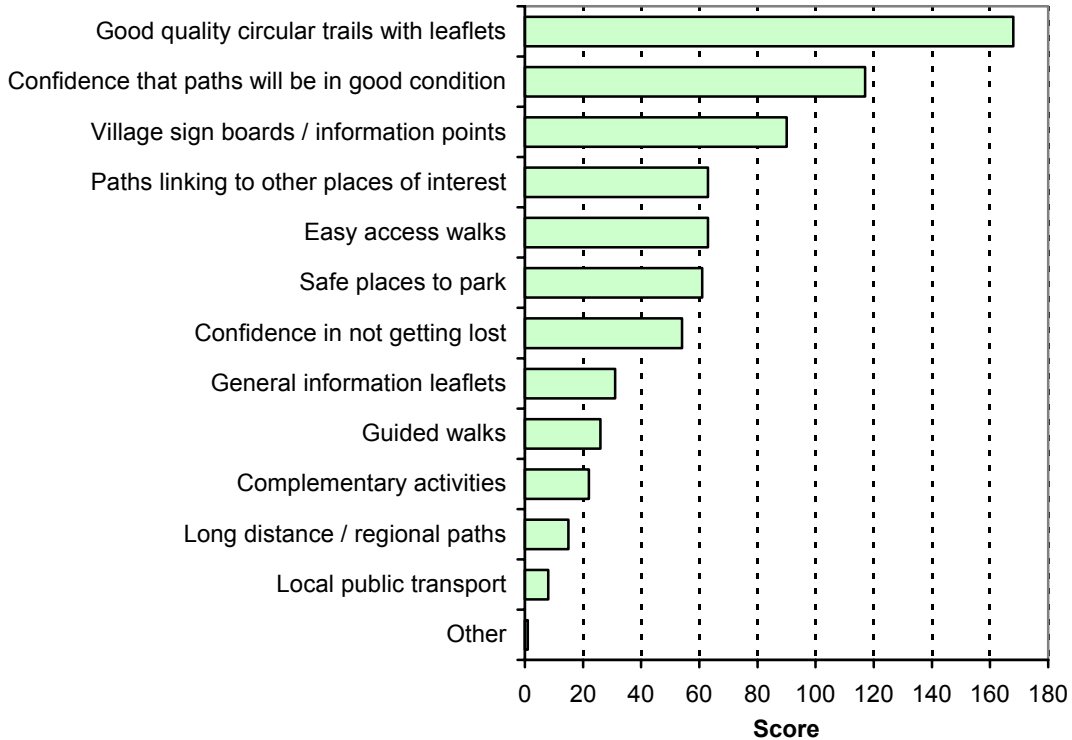
- It appears that 'field paths being properly reinstated through crops or following ploughing' is the main priority for Councils. The option was mentioned on 70 occasions in the top three priorities and was mentioned as the top priority by 23 Councils. The following table shows the frequency of responses for the other options.

Figure 5: Frequency of options

	Main Priority	Top 3 Priority
Field paths being properly reinstated through crops or following ploughing	23	70
Replacing stiles or barriers with gates or gaps	24	60
Field edge paths being clear of overgrowth	15	67
Improved roadside signage	21	52
Improved waymarking	13	56
Better path surfaces	11	33
Higher maintenance priority given to multi user paths	3	15
Other	3	9

- Councils were given the option of adding anything else to the list as a priority; keeping all paths clear of overgrowth, the provision of detailed maps and the removal of dog mess were mentioned as alternative ways forward.
- Councils were asked what would encourage people to use the network more. Figure 6 shows the results (using the same scoring system as before)

Figure 6: “What would encourage people to use the network more?”



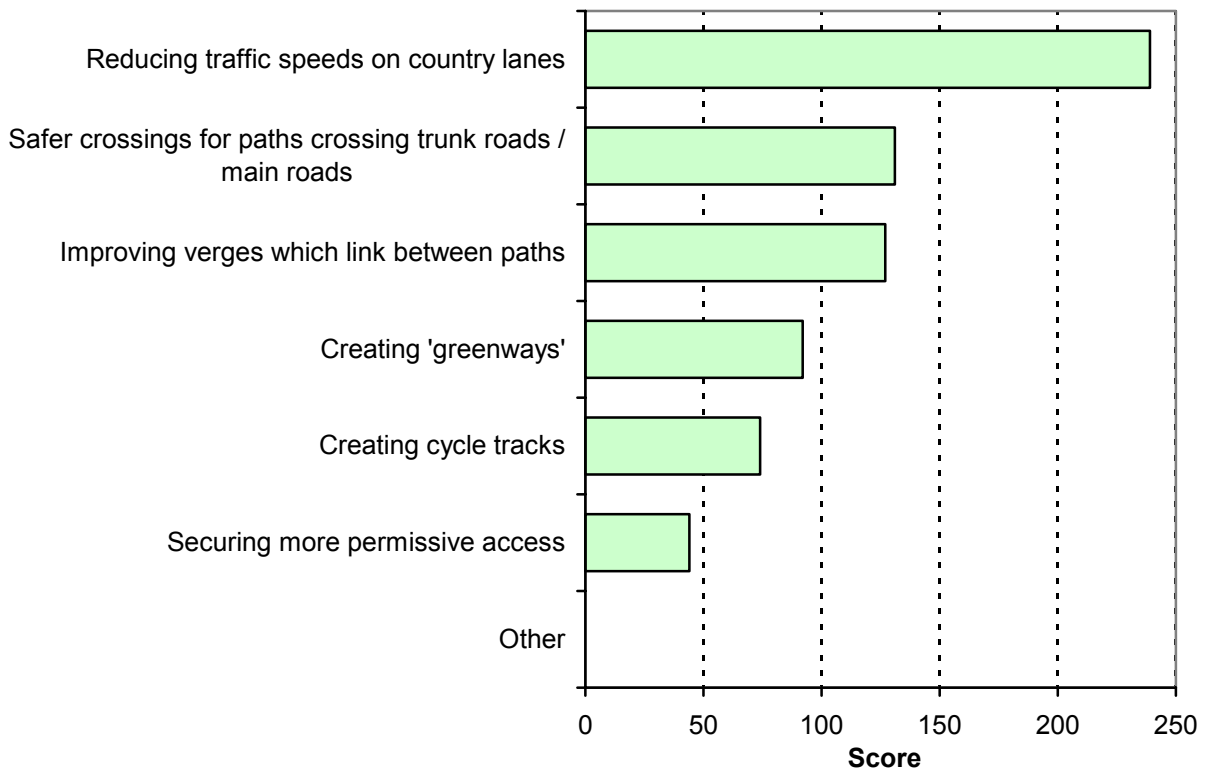
- 30 Councils stated that their top priority was ‘good quality circular trails and accompanying leaflets’, as well as a further 49 Councils placing the option in their top 3 priorities. Figure 7 shows the level of priority given to the other options in the questionnaire.

Figure 7: Frequency of options

	Main Priority	Top 3 Priority
Good quality circular trails and accompanying leaflets	30	79
Confidence that paths will be in good condition	23	56
Village sign boards / information points	22	40
Paths linking to other places of interest	4	43
Easy access walks	6	38
Safe places to park	6	39
Confidence in not getting lost	7	27
General information leaflets	3	18
Guided walks	4	12
Complementary activities	4	13
Long distance / regional paths	2	10
Local public transport	1	6
Other	0	1

- The only other option that was mentioned were the provision of classes in map reading and further information regarding local walks and local maps.
- Councils were asked what other types of access, which may be part of a walk or ride, they think the County Council should prioritise. Using the same scoring system as before, Figure 8 shows the results for the seven options.

Figure 8: “Thinking about other types of access which may be part of a walk or ride, which should we prioritise?”



- 64 Councils stated that reducing traffic speeds on country lanes was their main priority, whilst a further 30 Councils selected it in their top 3. Figure 9 shows how the options were prioritised by all the Councils.

Figure 9: Frequency of options

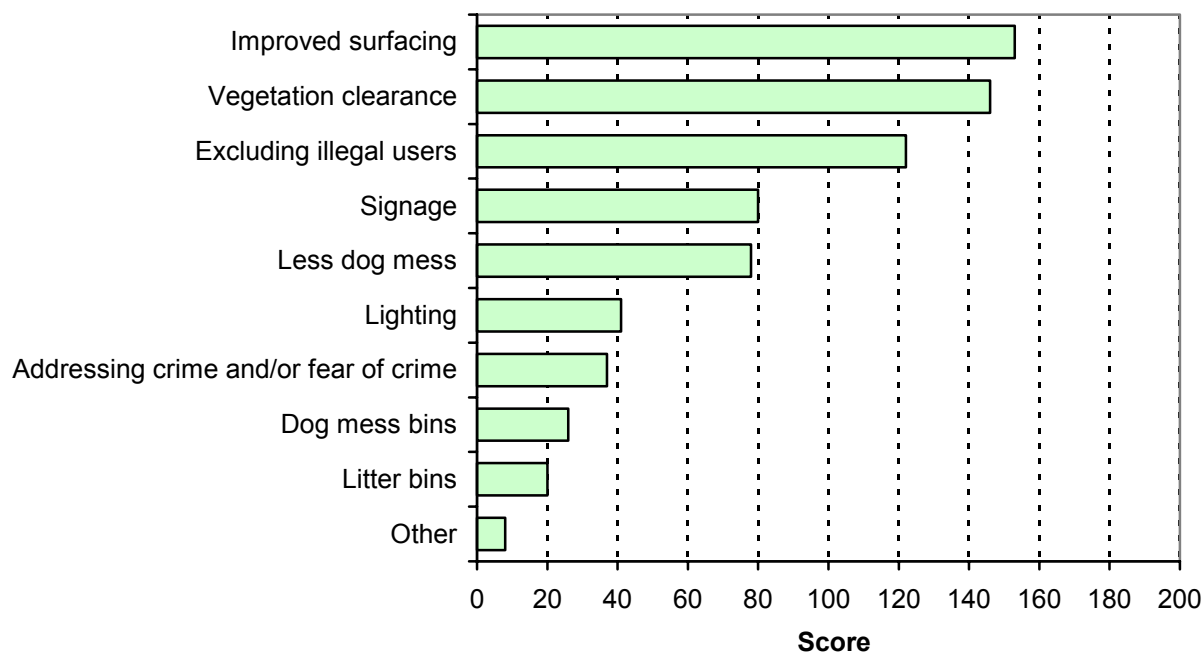
	Main Priority	Top 3 Priority
Reducing traffic speeds on country lanes	64	94
Safer crossings for paths crossing trunk roads / main roads	17	65
Improving verges which link between paths	22	61
Creating 'greenways'	10	53
Creating cycle tracks	4	44
Securing more permissive access	2	28
Other	0	0

- Councils were invited to suggest any other options that the Improvement Plan should consider, but no suggestions were put forward.

Setting priorities for your area – thinking about utility paths

- Using the same system as before, Councils were asked to prioritise their top three from the list of ten, the results are shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: “ What would improve utility paths?”



- 32 Councils put ‘improved surfacing’ as their top choice to improve utility paths, and a further 38 Councils had the option amongst their top three. ‘Vegetation clearance’ was also popular, being at the top of 19 Councils’ priorities and in the top three of a further 58 Councils.

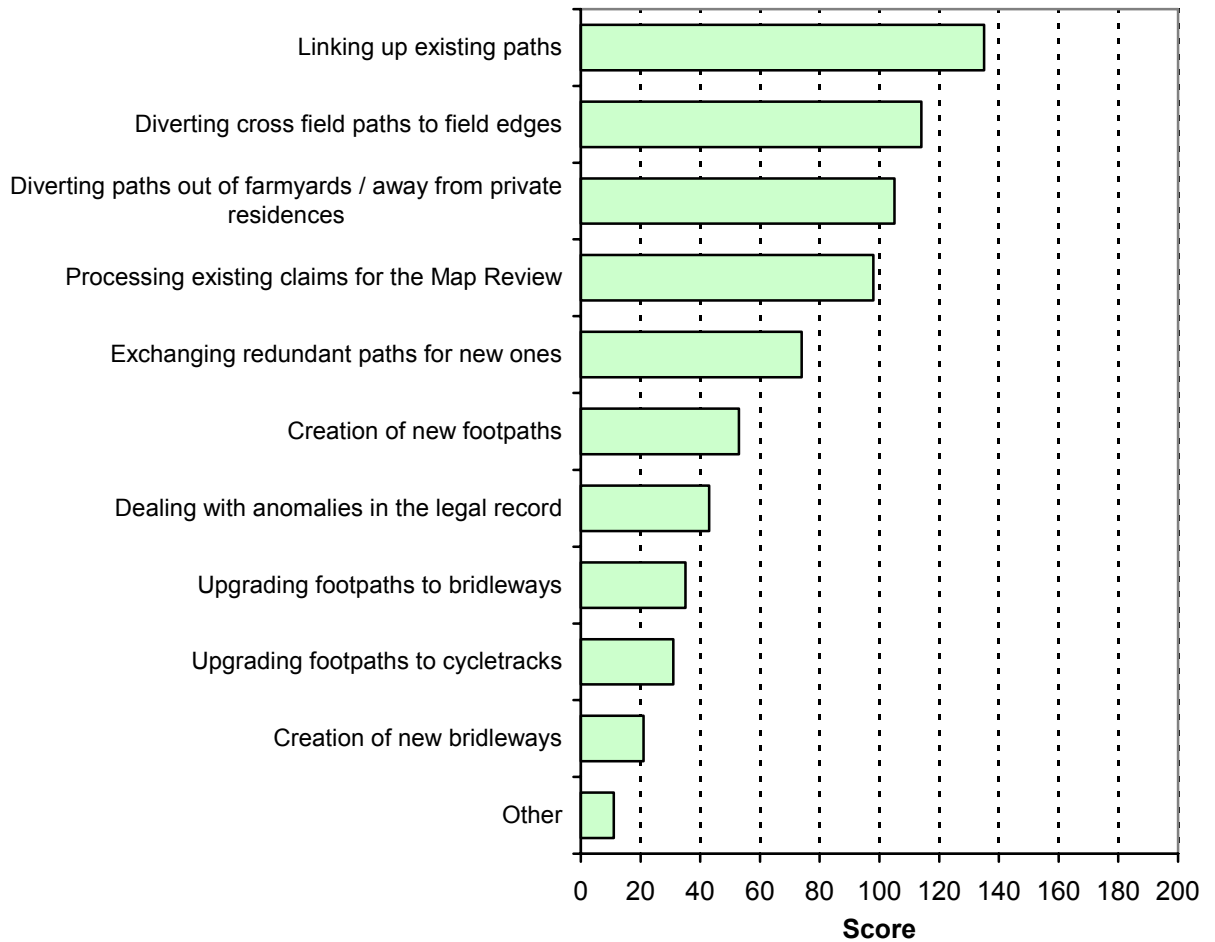
Figure 11: Frequency of options

	Main Priority	Top 3 Priority
Improved surfacing	32	70
Vegetation clearance	19	77
Excluding illegal users	28	53
Signage	12	42
Less dog mess	11	41
Lighting	3	24
Addressing crime and/or fear of crime	3	23
Dog mess bins	2	16
Litter bins	2	13
Other	2	1

- ‘Vehicles parking on paths’, ‘keeping dogs on leads’ and ‘complete links from one village to another’ were suggestions put forward by Councils as other ways utility paths could be improved.

- Councils were asked about what additions or changes should be made to the local utility path networks, the results are shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12: “ Thinking about adding to, or changing, the local network, where should our priorities lie?”



- The top four priorities that were highlighted by the responding Councils were fairly evenly distributed. Although ‘linking up existing paths’ came out as the top priority using the scoring system, ‘diverting paths out of farm yards or away from private residences’ was mentioned as the top priority by most of the Councils. Figure 13 shows the level of priority given to the other options.

Figure 13: Frequency of options

	Main Priority	Top 3 Priority
Linking up existing paths	20	72
Diverting cross filed paths to field edges	16	58
Diverting paths out of farm yards or away from private residences	22	48
Processing existing evidential claims as part of the Definitive Map review	21	47
Exchanging redundant paths for new, more useful, ones	7	42
Creation of new footpaths	10	24
Dealing with anomalies in the legal record	6	27
Upgrading footpaths to bridleways	7	16
Upgrading footpaths to cycletracks	3	18
Creation of new bridleways	3	12
Other	2	3

- ‘Creating new cycle ways into small towns and villages’, ‘removing damaging vehicles from footpaths’ and ‘removing dogs from areas where children play’ were all given as suggestions to improving the local network.

Community Involvement

- 36% of Councils said that they were currently participating in the Parish Paths Partnership scheme (P3) or have an established volunteer group working on paths, whilst 31% would like further information on P3.
- 16% of Councils have been involved in P3 or volunteering but no longer participate. The main reason for Councils no longer participating in the partnership is that they are subject to a three-year time restriction, which had run its course.
- 12% of Councils have no P3 or volunteer group, but do have a nominated Rights of Way Councillor.
- 3% of Councils are considering joining P3 whilst 8% of Councils have no interest in joining.

Figure 14: “What is the level of your involvement in local paths?”

Level of involvement	%
Currently participating in P3 or have an established volunteer group working on paths	36
Would like further information on P3	31
Have been involved in P3 or volunteering but no longer participate	16
Have no P3 or volunteer group, but have a nominated Rights of Way Councillor	12
Have no interest	8
Considering joining P3	3

- The questionnaire asked Councils what would encourage greater participation from their organisation in maintaining, improving and promoting local paths. The availability of a workforce or volunteer group was the most popular response, attracting 49% of Councils responses. Access to grants and other funding was the second most popular incentive, with 47% of Councils mentioning it as a priority. More support was mentioned by 15% of Councils, but 8% of Councils stated that there was nothing that would encourage them.

Figure 15: “What would encourage greater participation from your Council in maintaining, improving and promoting local paths?”

Incentive	No. of Parishes/Towns
Availability of a workforce or volunteer group	63
Access to grants and other funding	60
Support (rights of way training, workshops, talks from staff etc.)	19
Nothing would	10